

# +Feast of the Assumption

August 15, 2017

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey  
*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Signum magnum apparuit in caelo...A great sign appeared in Heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. Apoc. 12,1.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,  
My very dear sons,

Because we live in a place of spiritual darkness or, more exactly, of spiritual twilight (that half-light of Faith, as opposed to the vision), because the final truth concerning God and His Church has not yet appeared to our mortal eyes or to the eyes of our souls in its full splendor, because we struggle through life not knowing all there is to know about ourselves or about the world, having only a partial understanding, because of all of this God sends us *signs* in order to help us keep on the road leading to His Kingdom.

In the Old Testament we read of the many signs wrought by Moses—such as the parting of the Red Sea—and of wonders performed by the later prophets such as Elijah, who raised the widow’s son from the dead. Under the grace of the New Testament we learn of countless miracles and wonders performed by Our Lord and then by His Apostles and Saints. When Jesus found money changers in the Temple and overthrew their tables, the Jews asked him in astonishment, “What sign dost thou show unto us, seeing thou dost these things.”<sup>1</sup> The subsequent history of the Church, over two millennia, is filled with the signs of sanctity that characterize the lives of holy martyrs, of confessors, of monks and nuns, and of saints living a life in the world. These signs of divine origin are a significant part of the life of the Church.

One hundred years ago God revealed a very great *sign* under the image and mystery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This was at the center of the message of Fatima, no doubt the most important part of the revelations Our Lady made to the shepherd children. The miracle of the sun was most assuredly an extraordinary sign, a wonder that God alone could produce, but it was oriented toward the deeper message, toward the Immaculate Heart. Beginning on the second apparition at the Cova da Iria, on June 13, 1917, Our Lady gave to little Lucia in particular the mission of remaining in the world in order to establish the devotion to Her Immaculate Heart. “My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge,” she said, “and the way that will lead you to God.” In subsequent apparitions Our Lady told the children she would later come to ask for the Consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart. The theme came again in more personal revelations to Sr. Lucia, after the death of her cousins. Ever since the apparitions in the Cova da Iria, this sign of the Heart of the Mother of God has played a special role in the history of the Catholic world and in the secular world as well, being better appreciated little by little.

There is a Divine logic here, a sublime order. The Immaculate Heart points us, orients us like a sign, to the very person of the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary. Our Lady in turn points us to the mystery of the Church, of which she is a privileged and most eminent member. Both the Church as a whole and the Blessed Virgin form together a great sign orienting us toward the Lord Christ, the Word-Made-Flesh with His Sacred Heart. Christ’s two natures, human and divine, in the Holy Spirit, point us toward the Father, the Principle without principle, the First Person of the Holy Trinity. The explicit

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 2:18.

devotion to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart is something new in the world, but it takes us to the same vital reality as did previous prophetic signs.

But why the Immaculate Heart in *our* time, that is to say the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries? Well, for one thing this sign is the complement, the completion of the revelation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, given to a world grown cold in its lack of charity, after the ravages of Protestantism and of the pernicious heresy of Jansenism. The Faith was still there in the Catholic world of that time, but it was starting to die in many places and had to be revitalized. God alone knows how to do this. In our time the Immaculate Heart can and will produce the healing for us too: it is a life-giving medicine for a Christian culture grown sick and old. More positively, it is for God a kind of fountain through which the living waters of grace are poured forth upon the Church and the world.

Another reason why we can see that this divinely revealed prophetic sign of the Immaculate Heart corresponds to our time is that our social institutions are wallowing in sensuality, immodesty, and every form of impurity. Each day that goes by seems to bring a new invention of the devil to draw souls into the darkness of evil *substitutes* for that beautiful thing which is human marriage: substitutes that are not the "real thing" and therefore highly destructive of individuals and of society in general. I need say no more. "Immaculate" means "without spot." Our Lady, who is perpetually virgin, while being the Mother of God and the spouse of the Holy Spirit, is the only human person who was never even touched by sin. She is the mirror of God's own purity.

In this sense, the Immaculate Heart is also a kind of completion and confirmation of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, defined as Catholic dogma in 1854, just four years before Our Lady came to visit the earth at Lourdes in France.

So, let us be caught up in this prophetic movement of the great signs of God: the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Church herself, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, all pointing to the Most Holy and Triune God. A good time to meditate on all of this is before the Blessed Sacrament made present on the altar at Holy Mass or exposed in the monstrance during Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction. Beyond that there is little to say. Blessed Angela of Foligno spoke of the "beauty that closes the lips." We will hear more from God and better understand His signs as we practice a certain contemplative silence, whether we are monks, nuns, or just one of the Catholic faithful. "And when [the Lamb] had opened the seventh seal, there was a silence in heaven, as it were for half an hour."<sup>2</sup> We can alter the course of history by our actions in the domain of politics or in other social meeting places, but nothing will have so profound an effect as prayer. In fact, in prayer we too can become *signs*: signs of God, signs of His presence and His love. Our Lady of Fatima, Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia.

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<sup>2</sup> Revelations 8:1.